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By Our Wings

by [moogiorin](#)

Summary

Fareeha is the talented young captain of the Giza city guard. With the Overwatch agent Angela at her side, she must protect the city from an advancing horde of monsters under a dark spell. The captain's first true test is nigh, will she rise to meet the challenge?

It was a clear morning. Fareeha, captain of the Giza city guard, walked the wall. The rocky plains stretched almost as far as she could see, giving way to green just before slipping beneath the horizon. She breathed deeply, thankful as always for these quiet, warm mornings. The life of captain was one she fully enjoyed, happily serving her city, but she relished any time she got to herself. Between her own training, training the guards, and coordinating with the local Overwatch office, free moments were few and far between.

She continued her circuit of the city. Fareeha had started at the eastern gatehouse, a sturdy structure on the wall above one of the four city gates. Identical structures were situated facing each direction, with smaller towers at the corners of the square city. Catapults and ballistae lined the walls. It was well provisioned and defensible, a fact Fareeha was proud of. Despite her preparedness to do so, Fareeha hoped never to have to test the city. The captain approached the northern gatehouse, entering through a heavy wooden door.

The doorway entered on the second floor of the gatehouse, a sort of common area with wooden furniture and a recently extinguished fire. Above, guards kept constant watch. Fareeha left them to their work, walking down the stairs. Partway down the narrow stairway, she stopped between steps. A blonde woman clad in white and gold was walking towards her. Her eyes were downcast, scanning the thick tome in her hands.

“Angela,” Fareeha said, unable to hide her surprise.

Angela looked up with a pleasant smile, closing her book and clipping it to her belt.

“Just the one I wanted to see! Good morning captain. Would you come with me please?”

Fareeha nodded, following Angela back down the stairs.

“I didn’t think you’d be back already,” Fareeha said, falling in step beside Angela as they walked the city streets.

“Turned out to be some very motivated pranksters, not a griffin like the reports said. An impressive pair, let me tell you about them later. How have things been here?” Angela walked quickly along the main street, her destination clearly the local Overwatch building.

“Quiet. Some strange rumors, but quiet.”

“Rumors?”

Fareeha nodded, stepping behind Angela for a moment to allow a pair of workers to pass carrying a large box. She stepped back to her side and continued.

“Monsters acting strangely all over the kingdom. Dragons attacking at random, cyclopes leaving the mountains in the hundreds, shockingly organized goblin offensives. The rumors vary, but there does seem to be something strange going on.”

“Hm,” Angela bit at her thumb knuckle idly.

Before long, they stood in front of the Overwatch building, a large building with the logo hanging from a sign. A bell began to ring suddenly, and insistently. Fareeha looked towards the alarm. Angela gave her shoulder a gentle squeeze.

“Duty calls. Come by later, we’ll talk,” she said with a smile and a nod.

Fareeha nodded, setting off at a brisk run. She was somewhat thankful for the sudden exit she had to make; Angela wouldn’t see her blushing this way. As she ran towards the gate, an officer of the guard ran to meet her, struggling to keep up.

“A pair of cyclopes, captain. How do you want to handle them?”

“Take a group and attack one of them. I’ll handle the other myself,” Fareeha ordered quickly. The officer ran off to collect a squad. She stopped a short distance from the gate, waiting for it to open. The large mechanism protested at first, the gate rising slowly. As soon as it was open enough, she exited the city.

Some distance away from the city wall were two cyclopes, both dragging entire trees to use as clubs. Fareeha clicked her tongue in dismay, but summoned her magic to prepare for battle. Her magic aura rose to life with a rich gold color, the column of swirling energy reaching above the wall behind her. She held her hand out, siphoning a portion of the energy to form a brilliant orb below her open palm. When she clenched her fist a long spear composed of light sprang into existence. By then a group of a dozen guards had formed up behind her, armed with spears and shields.

“I’ll disarm them first. There’s no need to rush,” Fareeha began, walking towards the cyclopes. “Surround it, and fight carefully. It will only need one blow, after all.” She looked over her shoulder at each of the guards’ faces, nodding her encouragement. “Fight well.”

They charged together at the pair of cyclopes. Fortunately, they were fair enough from each other

to allow Fareeha and the guards ample room to focus on their given targets. Fareeha stopped suddenly, pulling her spear back and aiming briefly. She let the projectile fly, aiming between the cyclopes. It split in midflight, the twin missiles piercing the cyclopes' hands that held their makeshift weapons. Blood spurted from the wounds, the spears vanishing when their work was done. Both roared in pain as the guards gave up a cheer.

"Focus!" she snapped, marshalling another spear as she advanced.

The cyclops towered about her, swinging a bloody fist with slow but devastating power. Fareeha avoided its attack easily, stepping back from the initial swing and swatting aside the attempt to grab her with its unwounded hand. Fareeha stepped around the cyclops, thrusting repeatedly. Its thick hide was no match for her spear. Blood soon ran freely from a dozen wounds. The cyclops roared in frustration. It raised both hands high, aiming to bring both down on Fareeha. With a sharp report, another spear made from Fareeha's aura came from the cyclops' side. It pierced both hands and twisted, shackling them together.

Fareeha hopped back, aiming her spear once more. As she did her aura grew in intensity, and a dozen spears appeared floating behind her. When she let the one from her hand fly, the others followed. Pierced through with a dozen streaks of brilliant light, the cyclops fell dead instantly. As it fell, Fareeha looked towards the guards and their battle.

They had surrounded the cyclops, and were fighting it as ordered. When the cyclops turned to swing at one guard, three behind it charged and stabbed at whatever they could reach.

"Clear the area," she shouted, another set of spears forming behind her.

The officer looked towards her, nodding as he led the the guards to safety. The second cyclops fell just as the other, pierced a dozen times over. She waved to the guards as they cheered and saluted. The officer ran to her quickly, awaiting orders at attention.

"We'll need to dispose of them. Salvage anything we can use, you know the-" Fareeha stopped in midsentence, staring at the cyclops with her mouth agape.

Ominous purple runes had appeared on both of their bodies, pulsing darkly for a few seconds. Horrifyingly, the cyclopes began to stand, reanimated by some dark magic. Dark purple energy rose around them.

"Back to the city. Send Angela. I'll keep them busy," she spoke in short, clipped tones.

"Captain are you-" the guard began to protest, stopped by Fareeha grabbing a fistful of his collar.

"Now!" she ordered.

Fareeha looked impassively at the pair of cyclopes as the guards made their way back to the city. Their wounds closed before her eyes, formerly red eyes glowing purple. Fareeha's aura flared, shining gold against the cyclopes newfound energy. She rose up a few yards, the wings emblazoned on the back of her uniform shining gold. The cyclopes charged together, footsteps heavy. Fareeha easily flitted out of reach, flying above them. At her gesture, a volley of spears assailed the pair. She clicked her tongue in dismay, watching the fresh wounds heal before her eyes. One of the cyclopes dislodged a chunk of earth, throwing it at her with startling speed. The other, in her moment of distraction spent avoiding the attack, made towards the city.

"No chance," she muttered, darting towards the runner's back.

A spear larger than the others appeared over her shoulder, matching speed. With a shout of effort, she sent it hurtling forward. It went through the cyclops' calf, embedding in the ground on the

other side. From the point of impact, light chains spread across the cyclops' body. She landed as the gate behind her opened. A moment later, Angela was at her side.

"They were killed, and some dark spell brought them back. Any thoughts?"

"I'd have to get closer, examine the spell before breaking it," Angela shook her head. "Risky, but it's the only way I can."

Fareeha chewed her lower lip, but nodded. "Hang on," she said, putting her arm around Angela's waist.

When Angela's grip was secure, Fareeha took off again. The bound cyclops struggled in its chains. As it tore at them, they reformed. The other threw another large rock at them. Angela's own pale yellow magic mingled with Fareeha's as she held her hand towards the incoming projectile. It shattered harmlessly against the translucent shield she projected.

"I can see the runes from here," Angela said, raising her voice over the wind as Fareeha circled the pair of cyclopes. She launched spears intermittently, having no other option.

"I'll get you an opening," Fareeha promised. She dove suddenly, then turned to fly directly at the unbound cyclops.

She let go of Angela, who rolled upon touching the ground and ran towards the cyclops in Fareeha's golden wake. The captain formed her aura into two large blades, hefting them as if they were weightless. The cyclops swung at her. Fareeha's blades flashed, severing the limb. In three more flashing cuts, the cyclops fell forward without arms or legs. The rune atop its head began to glow, dark purple energy already pulling the limbs back into place.

Angela rushed forward, pressing her hands to the immobile cyclops' head. Tendrils of yellow pierced into the rune. She winced with the effort, as the rune seemed to press back, resisting her. With a clench of her fist and a harder push she overwhelmed the rune, shattering it. As it vanished, as did the purple aura. The cyclops limbs fell away again, and the beast was fully dead.

Angela looked around quickly, searching for Fareeha. She saw her in time to watch the captain lop off the other cyclops' head. It seemed removing the rune entirely was just as effective, Angela mused, making her way back towards the city. Fareeha landed at her side, both of their auras subsiding. Angela breathed a sigh of relief, and interlocked arms with Fareeha. Fareeha looked down in surprise as Angela put her head against her shoulder. Angela smiled up at her.

"You know, you'd make a great member of Overwatch," Angela said, not for the first time.

Fareeha laughed lightly. "How many attempts is that? My city needs me, you can see that."

"You could stay here! Nothing would change, we'd just be officially on the same team."

"There's more than that I'd like to be, officially," Fareeha said absently. Angela looked up at her, mouth slightly open until Fareeha looked back down. "I... I said that out loud, didn't I?"

Fareeha blushed as Angela nodded, grinning. The pair stopped a short distance from the open gate.

"I've had some interesting confessions, captain, but that was certainly one of the worst," Angela teased.

"I didn't say love!" Fareeha stammered, averting her eyes.

Angela put her hand on Fareeha's chin, gently guiding her gaze back to hers. "Neither did I, dear captain. It's an accurate word though, in both our cases."

Fareeha opened and shut her mouth a few times, seeming to have forgotten how to form words for a moment. In lieu of a proper response, she "Hmph!"-ed, and continued walking into the city.

Angela laughed again, jogging to catch up and lacing their arms together again.

"Goodness, killing a pair of enchanted cyclopes is quite a story we'll be telling our adopted children, huh?"

"You're never letting me live this down, are you?"

The two passed the officer from before, and he seemed unsure of how to approach them. Fareeha retrieved her arm from Angela, who hung back.

"Err, yes, the disposal team is ready captain."

"Good. I want the guard ready for anything, let's see to it that they are," Fareeha looked at Angela apologetically. "We'll talk later."

Angela nodded, blowing a playful kiss as she headed down the street towards the Overwatch building once more. She hardly paid any attention to anyone as she rushed up inside and headed towards her workshop. Angela pushed open the door to her workshop, and immediately set to work before the fiery inspiration faded. The spellbook clipped at her hip leaped to life, glowing faintly as its pages flipped quickly to where Angela had left off. It followed her to the workbench covered in loose papers. She stood at the bench, humming as she worked. After a long examination, she shut the book and picked up a sheet of paper. A faint chime could be heard accompanying the magic circle spinning slowly around her free hand. The paper pulsed with light briefly, hanging in the air when Angela let it go. She turned on a heel to the rack of weapons occupying almost the entire wall next to the bench. She chose a shortsword, taking a few practice swings before facing the enchanted paper. Angela swung and cut cleanly through the sheet. She watched with bated breath as the sheet fell in two halves. A moment later a louder chime sounded, the paper's two halves glowing brightly before reconnecting in the air. The sword clattered to the ground as Angela rushed forward, examining the paper with her nose nearly touching it. It was as if it had never been cut. There was faint golden line where it had been cut, which Angela carefully ran her finger along.

"Ha!" she clapped for herself and hopped up and down.

Angela grabbed the sheet and turned to leave. She pushed open the door, taken aback by the thud and resulting cry of pain. Fareeha stood in the hallway, staring up and holding her nose.

"Ow," she said, tone flat.

"I'm so sorry, I had no idea you were there!" Angela stepped forward quickly, raising her free hand to help. "May I?" she asked, her hand shining gold.

Fareeha nodded and closed her eyes. Angela gently moved her hand from her nose, and set to work. She tilted Fareeha's face back down so she was looking straight, and held her probably broken nose between two fingers. The glow intensified briefly, then subsided. Angela pulled her hand back and wiped away the blood that had rolled down to Fareeha's lip. Her gaze lingered for a few moments too long. When Fareeha cleared her throat, Angela realized they'd both been staring.

"I-is that better?" she asked, flustered. Fareeha laughed at the reddening of her cheeks, and

nodded.

“Much. Where were you going in such a rush, anyway?”

“To show you this!” Angela said, turning and picking up the enchanted paper. She held it inches from Fareeha’s face, waiting for a reaction.

“What, ah, what am I missing?”

Angela tore the sheet down the middle, handing one half to Fareeha and taking a step back with hers. She grinned as both halves began to glow, and let her sheet go to rejoin its other half in the captain’s hand. Fareeha blinked in surprise as the paper reformed before her eyes.

“I figured it out! That rune earlier was very strange. It gave me the idea to apply the magic differently. I kept trying and trying and trying, but always tried the same way. With a new approach, it’s a simple enchantment anyone can do with some practice.”

Fareeha was examining the sheet as Angela spoke, nodding appreciatively before she spoke. “Keep in mind, simple for someone like you might not be as easy as you think.”

Angela waved her hand dismissively and shook her head, “No no, I’m sure of it this time. I promise, this isn’t a repeat of the self filling quiver.”

“I still have scars,” Fareeha reminded her.

“But we learned so much!”

Fareeha raised an eyebrow, but couldn’t help but laugh.

“So, you were standing at my door for *some* reason. Did you need something?”

Fareeha suddenly seemed flustered, stumbling over her words as she spoke, “Ah, err, yes. Well, I wouldn’t say need exactly. I’ve finished informing my officers of the earlier situation. Until training later, I have some free time, and thought you might want to spend it together. If I’m not intruding, of course. You seem to be in the middle of working?”

Angela waved her hand and shook her head, dismissing the notion, “I’m done for now. A breakthrough deserves a break, after all. Would you like to come to my actual room? It’s much more comfortable than, well, a hallway.”

Fareeha nodded with a careful smile, “Lead on.”

Angela raised her eyebrows, “Hm? Ah.” She pointed over Fareeha’s shoulder at the door across from her workshop. “Just there, Fareeha.”

The captain stepped aside, smiling in spite of herself. She couldn’t hide the fact that Angela often caught her off guard, made her flustered, and doubt her usually unshakable officer’s confidence. Perhaps, she mused, a break from being the captain would be refreshing. Angela shut her workshop door, a wisp of yellow magic trailing from her fingertips when she let go of the handle. She caught Fareeha’s curious look and shrugged.

“Not everything I work on in there is as harmless as paper, you know?”

“Of course,” Fareeha nodded understanding as Angela opened the door to her actual room, entering after her.

The room was dim until Angela snapped her glowing fingers, illuminating the room with a series of runes on the ceiling. The magic runes spiralled inwards, meeting in the center with a pleasant glow; bright, but without the harshness of a lantern. It was fairly plain, but well kept. One corner of the room was taken up by her bed, perfectly made, but missing pillows. The desk across from it was strewn with some documents. Its chair held the missing set of pillows. Against the wall on the other side of the room was a small dresser, beside it a full length mirror.

“I hardly sleep here,” Angela explained, gesturing at the bed as she hastened to tidy up her desk. She knocked on it when the surface was clear, smiling as she answered the question visible on Fareeha’s face. “Here usually.”

“Working?” the captain shut the door quietly behind herself.

“Like you, always. This desk,” Angela half sat, half leaned on the desk as she crossed her arms and spoke, “Is where my real magic happens.”

“What do you mean?” Fareeha stood, almost as if at attention to an officer, in the middle of the room.

Angela opened her mouth to speak, then thought better of it. She inclined her head towards her bed, “You may want to sit if you’d like a full answer to that.” The mage tossed the pillows from her desk chair to their proper resting place. Angela made to move towards the middle of the room, touching Fareeha’s arm gently as they crossed paths. Gently she said “And please, Reeha, relax.”

“Of course,” Fareeha relaxed her stance, and sat down, leaning onto one hand.

“So!” Angela began, her smile turning into a grin as she turned on her heel to dramatically face Fareeha. “Where to begin, where to begin. My real magic, as it were, can’t start with practical tests. It’d be far too dangerous to start throwing enchantments and runes any old way without thorough theorizing and testing, and more theorizing, and more testing, and so on. I start there,” she waved at the desk, pacing back and forth as she spoke, “With drawings, and miniature models. A small, controlled environment to work out the first of many snags in the magic. It’s not all just a wave of a hand, and some whispered words I- What?”

Angela stopped midstride, noticing Fareeha’s growing smile. The captain couldn’t help but laugh.

“I’m sorry, Angela, I’ve just never seen you like this. You are full of surprises.”

“Pleasant surprises, I hope?”

“Of course. Please, continue.”

Angela went on like that for nearly an hour, pacing and lecturing, stopping when Fareeha had questions. Occasionally they switched positions, Angela sitting on her bed or desk while Fareeha told her stories about being captain of the guard. It was a relief to talk to someone like this. She found herself wanting to keep talking to Fareeha, for as long as she could. Just being in her company was a delight, one she was loathe to end. Despite knowing and working with Fareeha for nearly a year, it had taken all this time for Angela to realize how much the captain meant to her. Hours passed without either of them realizing it.

A long silence came between them when Angela finished talking again. Gazing at Fareeha on her bed, holding her pillow to her chest, Angela felt something she hadn’t for years. In the captain of the guard Angela found herself home, a sense of belonging. It was written on her face, and she couldn’t care less, closing the distance between them to stand in front of Fareeha. The captain looked up at her, not breaking the delicate eye contact or the silence. Angela draped her arms over

Fareeha's shoulders. She felt the blush creeping up her neck.

"Captain," she murmured, averting her eyes at long last, for only a moment. "Fareeha."

"Angie," Fareeha nodded her gentle encouragement.

"I do believe I've fallen in love with you."

Fareeha stood, putting one arm around Angela's waist and touching her cheek with her free hand. In lieu of an answer, she pulled Angela into a kiss, careful at first but deepening almost immediately. Angela pulled back first, opening her eyes slowly. She bit her lower lip and glanced at her bed.

"I might hardly sleep here, but gods you've made my bed seem so very inviting."

Fareeha raised her eyebrows, then grinned. "In that case," she sat again, pulling Angela onto her lap.

"Don't you have afternoon training?" Angela teased, her thumb on Fareeha's chin just below her lips.

"They can start without me."

That afternoon, for the first time in her years as captain, Fareeha missed a training session.

Grim news came the next day. Fareeha was walking through the city, not thinking of her direction and letting her mind wander to the previous night. She was snapped out of her reverie by a single alarm bell and the sound of the nearby gate opening. It was only one ring, so danger wasn't imminent, but she took off at a run anyway. Fareeha pushed to front of a group of guards standing around a wounded traveler. He clutched a bloody stump where his hand once was.

"Monsters," he shouted, falling towards Fareeha.

She steadied him carefully, holding him up by the shoulders. "Go on," she prompted.

He took a few gasping breaths, each one seeming to pain him. It was clear he was wounded far worse than a missing hand. Blood flowed freely from a large wound in his stomach.

"A horde of monsters, not half a day away. They've gone mad, destroying everything in their way."

The man collapsed as Fareeha's eyes widened. Before she could have him taken care of, he breathed his last. She crouched, shutting his eyes delicately. After a moment of thought, she stood and addressed the group of guards.

"I want every able guard ready for battle immediately. Ring the bells," Fareeha walked away as she finished, the guard's parting around her.

With a look of fierce determination, Fareeha made her way towards the Overwatch building. As she stepped onto the main street, the four bells began to ring together. It was a signal every towns person knew, but hoped to never hear. The city was to prepare for a large scale battle. Fareeha quickened her step.

She stopped at the Overwatch door, hearing audible footsteps approaching rapidly. She took a

step back just as the door swung open. Angela stood breathless in the doorway.

“Glad you learned to avoid doors,” she forced a smile in spite of the circumstances.

Fareeha tried to smile but her heart wasn't in it. Angela walked beside her as she turned towards the nearest gate.

“The rumors are true,” Fareeha started, “A traveler showed up today, told me a horde of monsters was approaching, and died at my feet.”

“How long?”

Fareeha shrugged. “Not half a day. I'd guess we have until evening.”

Angela exhaled slowly. “Then let's be ready.”

The town shifted quickly to prepare the defense. Anything the citizens were doing stopped, all hands offered in whatever form of assistance they could. Many volunteered to fight, arming themselves with anything they had on hand. With the afternoon sun beaming down on them, the monsters appeared from the east.

Fareeha looked out from atop the eastern gatehouse. She had never seen monsters in numbers like this. There were goblins operating crude war machines, accompanied by hundreds of cyclopes, wyverns, and other large beasts. A massive and sinister aura hung over the entire horde, clear evidence something was amiss. Angela, standing at Fareeha's side, relayed as much to the captain.

The eastern bell began to chime, repeatedly. Battle was imminent.

“I hoped never to have to test these walls,” Fareeha murmured when the bell stopped.

Angela heaved a sigh.

“I must be frank, Fareeha. This looks grim.”

Fareeha nodded her agreement. The horde drew closer, almost in range of their catapults. She wouldn't have to give the order; the city guard knew their jobs well enough. It seemed to take hours for the monsters to get close enough. Fareeha watched as the first volley of stones flew from the city walls. They landed crushing blows against the monsters, but they pressed on. Several cyclopes collected stones for use later.

“It won't be enough,” she murmured, watching as the monsters paid no attention to the impacts.

Angela put her hand on Fareeha's shoulder, both of their aura's rising together.

“I'm with you,” Angela promised.

Fareeha took a final deep breath and nodded to Angela. “Together then.”

The pair jumped from the top of the gatehouse, Fareeha with her arm around Angela's waist. She soared high above the horde, high enough to not have to worry about fire from the city. Fareeha rained spears on the horde, drawing from her own energy and Angela's to amplify their power. Their auras became one, each spear just as much Angela's as Fareeha's. Countless monsters fell under their barrage.

“Company,” Angela shouted, pointing at a pair of wyverns heading towards them.

Fareeha looked at them briefly, then dove. She was on a collision course with the nearest wyvern.

When it was close enough for its roar to reach her ears, Fareeha summoned a blade to her hand. She easily rolled herself and Angela out of the wyvern's snapping jaws. Her blade flashed, severing one wing and the wyvern's head in one motion. She turned in midair with the momentum of the swing, letting the blade go when she saw the other wyvern approaching rapidly. Angela gave Fareeha's blade a boost, sending it below the wyvern and then straight up to pierce its heart from below. Both fell lifeless, crushing monsters below.

Fareeha turned her attention back to the battle. The monsters were advancing much faster now, clawing at the stone wall as arrows and stones rained on them. Several dragons flew back and forth from the horde to wall, transporting talons full of goblins to the top of the wall. Most of them fell to their deaths, but enough survived on the wall to give the monsters a foothold.

"The wall," Angela said, Fareeha already on her way.

They landed amidst a tight knot of goblins, scattering them with a burst of golden magic. Fareeha launched herself at them immediately. Her spear found mark after mark. The goblins were stuck between herself and the guards shield wall, and fell quickly. Behind her, Angela held the rest of the group at bay with a transparent magic shield. The goblins slashed at it with crude blades, fruitlessly.

Fareeha turned when her group was finished, throwing her spear. It passed through Angela's shield to impale one goblin. Fareeha snapped her fingers, causing the spear to split into a dozen miniatures and finish off the survivors.

She took the brief respite to examine the battle. Much of the horde had fallen, yet many more remained. The monsters seemed to be pulling back for now, a seething mass in the fading evening sun. Four large dragons circled overhead, seeming at peace with doing so for the time being. They had deflected the monster's first attack with seemingly few injuries. Fareeha was sure the worst was still to come.

"I'll tend to the wounded," Angela said, setting off on her own.

Fareeha nodded, heaved a great sigh, and set off alone as well. It was going to be a long evening, she feared. Fareeha walked the wall, the fighting finished for the time being. She offered what support she could to the guards she passed; a reassuring nod, a hand to steady a shaking shoulder. She held her hand out to a guard sitting with his knees hugged to his chest. He looked up, the fear plain in his face.

"We've won for now. You're still here. How many of those beasts can no longer say the same, hm?"

He hesitated for a moment, then forced a smile as he took Fareeha's hand. Fareeha pulled him to his feet, then clapped him on both shoulders.

"Your comrades are counting on you now. Remember your training, and you won't let them down."

"Captain!" the guard saluted, right fist over his heart, with all the zeal he could muster.

Fareeha continued in similar fashion, making her way to the south eastern tower rising from the wall's corner. Upon reaching it and finding the guards there relatively well off, she turned to make her way back to the gatehouse. She heard the telltale chimes of Angela's magic inside, and pushed her way through the already ajar door. Angela had taken over the second floor of the gatehouse, giving medical attention to anyone who needed it. Bedrolls were lined up at the far wall, benches and tables scattered. Fareeha watched Angela tending the lone patient with a heavy heart. Angela

looked at her with a strained smile, her own exhaustion plain as day. Angela looked up to the sound of the door closing, and smiled when she saw who had entered.

“Captain,” Angela spoke when she was finished working, the guard sleeping peacefully.

She stood and crossed the room to Fareeha quickly, and all but fell into her arms. Fareeha put her arms around her wordlessly. She buried her nose in pale blonde hair, breathing deep with her eyes closed in a futile effort to forget their troubles, if only for a moment. Somehow Angela’s hair still smelled of flowers. Angela’s grip tightened momentarily, before she let go. Fareeha couldn’t help but smile, despite the circumstances.

“How are things looking?” she asked.

“We’re holding. Morale is low, but we’re holding,” Angela walked to a bench, sitting as she spoke.

Fareeha joined her, straddling the bench to face her. Angela turned, propping herself up with an elbow on the table. They shared a long gaze, finding strength in simply being around each other. Fareeha scooted and leaned forward, a motion Angela copied as they pressed their foreheads together.

“We’ll get through this,” Angela murmured after a long pause.

Fareeha moved back just far enough to put her hand on Angela’s chin, tilting her face up. Angela cut off her plan to steal a kiss, darting forward and planting one on her cheek. She covered her mouth with one hand as she laughed, then pulled Fareeha into a proper cheek.

“You’re going to let me take the lead one of these days,” Fareeha said, blush creeping up her neck unchecked.

Angela adjusted herself so she was also straddling the bench, “Oh?”

She lifted her legs, draping them over Fareeha’s thighs. Fareeha’s mouth hung open, taken aback. To her credit, she recovered quickly, reaching forward and pulling Angela into her lap. Their lips met again, kissing passionately and deeply. Angela put one hand on Fareeha’s shoulder, the other gripping a fistful of black hair. She tipped forward and pushed Fareeha onto her back, straddling Fareeha rather than the bench. Angela ended their kiss abruptly, planting a trail as far down Fareeha’s neck as she could reach.

“But not this day, I see,” Fareeha bit her lower lip.

“No, my dearest captain. Not today,” Angela’s laughter was light, and music to Fareeha’s ears.

Angela put her head on Fareeha’s chest, thankful she wore armor light enough to be a comfortable pillow. Her hand glowed a gentle yellow and she held it a few inches above Fareeha’s stomach. She clicked her tongue in dismay.

“What is it?” Fareeha asked, looking down curiously.

Angela’s brow furrowed, “Your protection enchantments have faded. Let me redo them.”

She didn’t wait for Fareeha’s answer, immediately setting to work from her comfortable position. Her pinky nail lit up until it was painful to look at, and she used it to trace a series of layering magic runes, giving each a moment to disappear before adding more. As she worked, bells chimed along with the flow of magic.

“You were out there fighting like this,” Angela said quietly when she was done, turning her face to Fareeha.

Fareeha averted her eyes, chewing her lip.

“Reeha,” Angela spoke more insistently, reaching up to turn Fareeha’s face to her. She stared into her eyes, pleading. “You’re not just fighting for yourself out there. Be careful. Okay?”

Fareeha placed a swift kiss on Angela’s forehead, “I will. I’m sorry, Angie.” She half-smiled.

“With your runes, though, what have I got to worry about?”

Angela scrunched up her face, “Hush and listen to your future wife.”

Fareeha laughed, “Yes ma’am.”

Hours passed, and night fell outside without incident. The bell ringing just above them woke Fareeha and Angela. Both fell from the bench, sharing a brief laugh before heading up the stairs. What they saw erased any levity.

The monsters had all scattered, and the ominous aura hanging over them had shifted. Approaching the gate, however, was an enormous dragon, nearly as tall as the wall. It seemed all the magic hanging over the horde had been concentrated into the dragon. Catapults and arrows seemed to have no effect, bouncing off its hardened scales.

“Hold fire!” Fareeha shouted. She locked eyes with Angela before taking her by the waist once more. “Ready?”

“Together,” Angela nodded.

They took off, a shining light in the darkness. Fareeha flew straight for the dragon, launching a volley of spears at its face. They shattered against its immense dark purple aura. The dragon spat flame, which Angela deflected with a magic barrier. They went back and forth with the dragon like that for a time, trading spears for blasts of flame.

“This isn’t working!” Angela said as the smoke cleared from another fire blast. “It must have a weakness. Those runes the cyclopes had, try to find me one!”

Fareeha nodded her understanding, circling the dragon. She dodged under its spiked tail, and avoided its massive wings. Angela pointed suddenly. Between the dragon’s wings there was a large rune, identical to the one affecting the cyclopes. Fareeha landed them right beside it, and Angela set to work. She knelt beside the rune, putting both hands on near it. Magic poured out of her unchecked, tendrils of yellow trying to force their way into the rune. Fareeha looked from Angela to the wall, then back to her.

“Not much time,” she urged.

“I know, I know,” Angela said, strain in her voice.

The dragon roared, spewing flame across the top of the wall and blasting the gate. It held strong, but it was only a matter of time.

“Angela!”

“Put your hand here!” Angela motioned to the space beside her.

Fareeha crouched, mimicking Angela’s position.

“When I tell you, push your magic into the rune as hard as you can. There’s no point in-”

“Save the theory. When you’re ready.”

Angela nodded, took a breath, and steeled herself.

“Now!”

Their golden and yellow aura’s shined like a beacon, quickly overwhelming that of the dragon. The rune began to crack, the dragon roaring in response. It seemed overcome with pain, shaking as Fareeha and Angela worked.

“More,” Angela said through clenched teeth.

More golden cracks appeared in the purple rune, eventually overwhelming it completely. It shattered with a sound like a breaking pane of glass. The dragon roared again. The flames it spat were weak, not even reaching the gate. As its aura subsided, Fareeha carried Angela away. Before their eyes, the dragon’s body was suddenly covered in countless smaller runes. Half a beat later, it ignited in brilliant purple flame.

Angela looked at Fareeha, eyes wide. Behind the enormous dragon, most of the monsters seemed to have turned and run. They were met with a raucous cheer from the guards when they landed atop the gatehouse. Fareeha pulled Angela into a tight hug. There was still much work to do in finding those responsible, but the day was theirs for the time being.

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